

5 hours. That is 20,000 acres—nearly the size of the entire city of Bend, OR—that burned in the time span of an extra-inning baseball game.

With the Forest Service budget effectively flatlined and the higher cost of fighting fires producing this robbing of other programs that I have described—the fire borrowing—what you have is a vicious, self-defeating circle of fire-fighting and shoddy budgeting, which, in effect, will cause an even bigger crisis in the future because you shorted the prevention fund. In 10 years, if this isn't fixed—what is known as fire borrowing—the Forest Service says it will be spending two-thirds of its entire budget on suppressing wildfires, and my constituents say they will be calling the Forest Service the Fire Service because that is essentially what they will be.

This is particularly serious right now, which is why I came to the floor tonight to try to drive home the urgency of this issue, because it is so dry in the West. This year Governor Brown of my home State has declared drought emergencies in 23 of our 36 counties. All 36 counties are experiencing severe drought, according to the National Drought Center. It is a very dangerous mix of factors, what I have come to call the terrible trifecta of drought and temperatures and fuel load. They all came together and turned the West into a virtual tinderbox.

To try to fix this, my colleague Senator CRAPO and I have worked together for quite some time to in effect say that what we ought to do is break this dysfunctional system of fighting fires and go with a different approach. What we would say is that the biggest fires—the 1 or 2 percent of the megafires—we ought to fight them from the disaster fund because they really are disasters. Use the prevention fund for what it is intended, which is prevention, so we can keep from having those megafires.

The good news is that the Congressional Budget Office—my colleague is new here, but he already knows that the Congressional Budget Office is our official scorekeeper—says that there really aren't added costs for this approach because while you would spend a bit more money trying to put out those megafires, you would save some money by not cheating the prevention fund and not having so many fires in the first place.

In effect, it is a lot smarter for the agencies to focus on keeping our forests healthy and clear of the fuels that go up in flames when lightning strikes. So we do the preventive work and we no longer are shorting it by all the fire borrowing which I have just described.

Senator CRAPO and I have been able to get well over 250 organizations to go on record in support of our idea. These are groups associated with forestry policy, environmental folks, industry personnel, people across the political spectrum. More than 250 groups have said they are in support of this. The Under Secretary of Agriculture, Robert

Bonnie, noted in a recent letter that the proposal Senator CRAPO and I have offered is one that both fixes fire borrowing and provides the resources needed to prevent these catastrophic wildfires down the line. Fifteen of our colleagues here in the Senate have supported the bill, and 123 Members in the other body have also supported the bill. The administration is on board. The agencies that battle these fires are waiting for the Congress to act.

Each day, the reality in the West is that immensely brave men and women are on the ground fighting fires, and they risk their lives to keep our homes and communities protected. It is long, long, long past time for the Congress to step up, fix this budgetary mess, and guarantee that the funding is there to fight fires and to prevent them in the first place.

I filed our bipartisan bill as an amendment to the Transportation bill. I filed a wildfire amendment to the budget resolution. I filed the Senate Interior appropriations wildfire language as an amendment to the Transportation bill. And I believe this is the fourth time in recent months I have been on the floor talking about this issue, and that is in addition to talking about it in the budget markup and in several hearings in the natural resources committee that I had the honor to chair in the last Congress.

I see my new colleague in the chair, and he has been doing good work on this fire borrowing issue. And even with everything else we are dealing with here in the Senate, I think it is very important that we focus on an actual way to leave with an agreement on how this is actually going to get fixed and get done. In that regard, I have been talking in the last day or so with colleagues in both political parties, and I think there is now this sense of urgency because we see it not only on TV, but every time we are home, we go to fire briefings. As the Presiding Officer knows, even fire briefings have changed very dramatically. We used to have a fire briefing in July, and now we have fire briefings—as I did—in the winter because the Forest Service and the folks at BLM often say they are not even sure when one fire season has ended and the next one has begun because these challenges have gotten so great.

Senator CRAPO and I, with this bill that has gotten more than 250 organizations sponsoring it, have talked in just the last few hours. We want to work with all of our colleagues to make sure that we get some sense because our constituents are going to ask about this. They are going to ask about this issue this summer. They are going to ask: How is the Senate actually going to get this done? How is the Senate going to fix this broken, dysfunctional system of fighting fires? In effect, year after year—and I gather there will be some new analyses coming out—the entire budget for the Forest Service is getting eaten up in fighting these counterproductive fires.

Senator CRAPO and I have a proposal that received a favorable score from the Budget Committee. I know my colleague in the chair has also done very good work on these issues, as have a number of Senators on both sides of the aisle. Given the good will I have seen among Senators here in the last couple of days as we talked about what this really means, given the urgency and because we are going home and seeing constituents in August, I am convinced we can have an agreement on how this is going to get fixed. That is why I wanted to come to the floor tonight, because there are a lot of topics that are still going to be tackled in the next few days before the Senate wraps up. I want it understood that our part of the country is on fire. It is on fire. We have communities burning up, and business as usual is unacceptable.

Senator CRAPO and I have offered a proposal that we think will turn this around, and other colleagues have very good ideas as well. What is nonnegotiable is just saying: Oh, you know, maybe we will take care of it at the end of the year or on standard congressional time. That is not good enough for the West, which is burning up.

I invite my colleagues here, as we move forward in the last few days before the August recess, to join me, Senator CRAPO, and colleagues in both political parties to make sure that people see—as we go home to talk to the people we have the honor to represent—that this is now going to actually get fixed and that the Senate is coming together to make sure it actually gets done. We are going to turn this around so that we can do more to prevent fires in the rural west, No. 1, and No. 2, fight them in a more cost-effective way.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DAINES). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### TRIBUTE TO SCOTT WATTS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the distinguished career of Scott "Scotty" Watts, who served as the president of the Nevada Alliance for Retired Americans, NARA, from 2001 until his retirement in 2014.

Building on the work of its predecessor, the Nevada National Council of Senior Citizens, NARA has been at the